



# Search Engine Marketing (SEO/SEM)

## 5 Reasons CPA Firms Should Integrate SEO into Marketing Efforts

Many CPAs and accountants want to know how to use limited marketing resources to best position their firm. Should firms continue to invest in traditional marketing activities such as ads, sponsorships, direct mail and e-mail marketing, or venture into Web site marketing, and more specifically, Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

“Getting noticed” is what SEO is all about. A still-new technology, SEO increases the likelihood your company will be more easily noticed. Anyone searching for information in Google or any other search engine will find you based on words embedded in your Web site. Once SEO is a part of your online efforts, reports generated through an Internet Service Provider provide practical information you can use to find out who clicked through your site.

While most marketing professionals find SEO appealing, many have reservations about how to sell the strategy to management. Altering or changing long-standing marketing activities can be difficult, especially in the middle of a recession. Finding the most effective way to present new ideas to firm partners is imperative, especially if your firm is a “slow mover.”

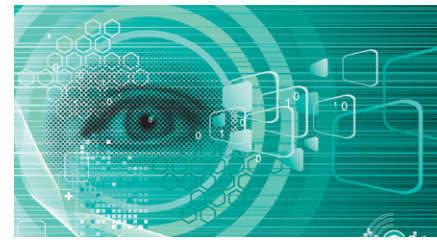
Positioning SEO as a viable marketing strategy has a very positive and meaningful impact on your firm’s marketing efforts – often immediately and at little or no cost. Here are five reasons why SEO works.

**1 SEO Provides Access to ‘Warmer’ Leads.** Inbound marketing techniques such as SEO allow your firm to connect with more qualified opportunities. When a company contacts you through the Web site, it is usually ready to make a decision to buy. The company already identified its internal need, researched potential solutions to the problem and identified specific providers. When a prospect comes to your firm in this fashion, it reduces the amount of time spent educating the prospect, communicating the firm’s value proposition and lead-time in pursuing the prospect.

**2 SEO Maximizes Partners Chargeable Hours.** Due to the reduced amount of time spent pursuing opportunities, the time invested by a firm’s partners is also reduced. Whether a firm has a business development/marketing function, there is less time spent on site visits, prospect



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meetings and conference calls to move the prospect through the sales cycle. With SEO, partners are able to insert themselves into the sales process in a time efficient way – selling the opportunity in a much shorter time period than leads identified through traditional marketing techniques. The process leads to additional time for partners to focus on chargeable work.

**3 SEO Expands Your Marketing Footprint.** SEO allows firms to attract opportunities outside of their geographical footprint. While there are a number of services firms offer that can be performed in markets across the country, the marketing dilemma focuses on resource allocation. For example, does it make sense to invest marketing dollars in cities where the firm has little brand awareness? Of course not. However, SEO allows your firm to promote itself in other markets without incurring additional costs. Would your firm be interested in serving clients in other markets if the opportunity presented itself? Through focused SEO, your firm can find these opportunities.

**4 SEO Creates a Larger Pipeline.** Optimizing your Web site to attract new opportunities will help your firm create a large pipeline of opportunities. Consider how your firm attracts prospects currently: Do you send out mailings? Newsletters? Many firms invest time and effort into traditional outbound marketing techniques, such as direct mail, e-mail and lead-generation telemarketing. With an optimized Web site, however, you have a sales tool that works to find new opportunities on a 24/7 basis.

**5 SEO Adds Value to Marketing Activities.** Most marketing departments in firms are expected to develop, lead and manage non-revenue producing programs. Ad design, proposal development, collateral material development and pursuit planning, while valuable, do not produce any firm revenues. SEO changes the paradigm and turns marketing into a lead generation source. If properly implemented, SEO can transform marketing beyond an internal services function and position it as a revenue generator for the firm.

There are many other ways SEO and inbound marketing techniques help drive practice growth. However, these five are used successfully in selling partners on short- and long-term benefits. CPAs and accountants are not marketing professionals, but they can understand the value associated with a planned process. Focus on meaningful benefits, such as less time in the sales process, more time to address client needs and ability of the firm to attract a larger number of prospects.

